

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LONDON 10564 01 OF 02 051717Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
HA-05 MCT-01 /072 W
-----022752 051844Z /53

R 051704Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7806
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 10564

E. O. 11652:GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: GENERAL ELECTION: THE CONSERVATIVES AND
NORTHERN IRELAND

REF: A) STATE 164631; B) LONDON 10072

SUMMARY: CONSERVATIVE LEADER THATCHER'S RECENT
BELFAST SPEECH (REF B) SEEMED TO IMPLY A TORY GOVERNMENT
MIGHT END THE BIPARTISAN POLICY TOWARD NORTHERN IRELAND
(NI) AND MOVE TOWARD A PRO-UNIONIST POSITION. IN OUR
VIEW HER SPEECH AND OTHER SUGGESTIONS OF SUCH A
POSSIBLE CHANGE SHOULD BE SEEN IN THE CONTEXT OF
POSSIBLE COALITION BUILDING RATHER THAN OF MAJOR
POLICY CHANGE. ALTHOUGH A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT
HEADED BY THATCHER WOULD NO DOUBT BE MORE SYMPATHETIC
TO THE UNIONIST CAUSE, AT LEAST INITIALLY, IT WOULD
FACE SERIOUS CONSTRAINTS IN ATTEMPTING FUNDAMENTAL
ALTERATION IN BRITISH POLICY TOWARD NI. THE PRINCIPAL
CONSTRAINTS ARISE FROM: THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL
ENVIRONMENT; THE NATURE OF BRITISH GOVERNMENT; THE
INTERNAL SECURITY SITUATION IN NI AND BRITAIN; AND THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LONDON 10564 01 OF 02 051717Z

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT. THEREFORE ANY
DRAMATIC CHANGE IN THE CURRENT BRITISH POLICY--TO ALLOW
THE PEOPLE OF NI TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN POLITICAL FUTURE,
SUBJECT ONLY TO THE CONDITION THAT THE CHOICE BE
BROADLY SUPPORTED BY BOTH THE PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC
COMMUNITIES, WHILE ESCHEWING AN IMPOSED SETTLEMENT AND
TRYING TO CONTROL THE SECURITY SITUATION--SEEMS HIGHLY

UNLIKELY. CAUTIONARY ACTION BY THE USG, ACCORDINGLY,
IS NOT REQUIRED. END SUMMARY

1. MRS. THATCHER'S JUNE 18 SPEECH TO A SELECTED UNIONIST AUDIENCE IN BELFAST (REF B), TAKEN TOGETHER WITH SHADOW NI SPOKESMAN AIREY NEAVE'S RECENT STATEMENTS AND THE TORIES' TRADITIONAL CLOSE LINKS WITH THE NI UNIONIST MOVEMENT, STIRRED SPECULATION HERE AND ABROAD THAT A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT MIGHT ABANDON THE CURRENT BIPARTISAN APPROACH TO NI, OPTING FOR A POLICY LINE SUPPORTING THE REESTABLISHMENT OF PROTESTANT POLITICAL ASCENDENCY. CURRENT BRITISH POLICY CAN BE SUMMARIZED AS ALLOWING THE PEOPLE OF NI TO DECIDE THEIR OWN POLITICAL FUTURE--WHETHER LINKED TO BRITAIN, JOINED TO THE REPUBLIC OR INDEPENDENT--PROVIDED THAT IT IS BROADLY SUPPORTED BY BOTH THE PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES, WHILE REFRAINING FROM TRYING TO IMPOSE A SOLUTION AND ACTIVELY SEEKING TO REDUCE THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE. IN OUR JUDGEMENT, ANY CHANGE IN THIS BASIC POLICY LINE IS UNLIKELY BECAUSE OF THE SAME CONSTRAINTS THAT HAVE LIMITED THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT'S FREEDOM OF ACTION. RATHER, THATCHER'S REMARKS, WHICH LACKED SPECIFICITY BUT WERE CLEARLY DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE UNIONISTS TO BELIEVE A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE MORE SYMPATHETIC TO THEIR GOALS OF RESTORING PROTESTANT POLITICAL
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LONDON 10564 01 OF 02 051717Z

SUPREMACY AND STRENGTHENING THE UNION WITH BRITAIN, SHOULD BE SEEN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NATIONAL POLITICAL SCENE AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE NEXT ELECTION WILL END IN A HUNG PARLIAMENT. THATCHER'S COMMENTS THEREFORE SEEM CALCULATED TO ATTRACT UNIONIST SUPPORT AT A TIME WHEN THEIR TEN PARLIAMENTARY VOTES MIGHT BE PIVOTAL IN THE FORMATION OF A GOVERNMENT. HER COMMENTS AND THE ACTIONS OF NEAVE AND OTHERS, THEN, REPRESENT THE OPENING MOVES IN A COALITION-BUILDING EXERCISE THAT MAY OR MAY NOT COME TO FRUITION.

2. BEFORE EXAMINING THE MAIN CONSTRAINTS LIMITING HMG OPTIONS IN NI, WE SHOULD IDENTIFY THE ASSUMPTION UNDERPINNING OUR ASSESSMENT: THAT ANY DRAMATIC, PRO-UNIONIST SHIFT IN BRITISH POLICY WOULD TRIGGER A SHARP UPTURN IN PROVISIONAL IRA (PIRA) VIOLENCE IN NI, AND POSSIBLY BRITAIN AS WELL, AND A PROTESTANT RESPONSE IN KIND; ESCALATING VIOLENCE WOULD POLARIZE NI, FORCING NI CATHOLICS TOWARD THE PIRA AND PROTESTANTS TOWARD THEIR PARAMILITARY GROUPS, WHILE INCREASING PRESSURE ON BRITISH TROOPS AND THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY; DETERIORATION IN THE NI SECURITY AND

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LONDON 10564 02 OF 02 051721Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
HA-05 MCT-01 /072 W
-----022780 051844Z /53

R 051704Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7807
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 10564

POLITICAL SITUATIONS WOULD INTENSIFY POLITICAL STRESS
WITHIN BRITAIN AND PRESSURE FROM OUTSIDE.

3. THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CONSTRAINTS INHIBITING ANY
BRITISH GOVERNMENT ARISE FROM: DOMESTIC POLITICS,
PARTICULARLY INTERNAL DIVISIONS IN THE TORY PARTY;
THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AND MILITARY FORCES IN
BRITISH GOVERNMENT; THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE ENGENDERED
BY THE NI SITUATION, WHETHER IN NI OR BRITAIN; AND THE
INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO DEVELOPMENTS IN NI, PARTI-
CULARLY FROM THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND, THE EC AND
THE US.

--THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IS DIVIDED ON THE NI
QUESTION, GENERALLY ALONG RIGHT/LEFT LINES. THE RIGHT
TENDS TO BE QUITE SYMPATHETIC TO THE UNIONIST CAUSE,
WHILE THE LEFT ("MODERATES") RECOGNIZES THE NEED FOR
ACCOMMODATION BETWEEN THE TWO COMMUNITIES AND THE
IRISH INTEREST IN NI. DEPUTY PARTY LEADER WHITELAW
WAS THE "FATHER OF NI POWER SHARING" AND ALMOST
CERTAINLY WOULD ENJOY THE SUPPORT OF A MAJORITY OF
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LONDON 10564 02 OF 02 051721Z

TORY MPS ON THE NI QUESTION. A SHARP TILT TOWARD THE UNIONIST POSITION BY A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT, ACCORDINGLY, WOULD BE RESISTED BY IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN THE CABINET AND ON THE BACKBENCHES, RISKING A SPLIT OF THE PARTY. THE LABOR PARTY, THOUGH DIVIDED ON SOME ASPECTS OF NI POLICY, IS UNITED IN ITS ANTIPATHY TOWARD THE IDEA OF PROTESTANT ASCENDENCY. AS THE MINOR PARTIES EITHER SUPPORT OR ARE INCLINED TOWARD THE LABOR POSITION, A TORY MOVE TOWARD THE UNIONISTS WOULD ENSURE THEIR UNITED OPPOSITION. WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF HER OWN PARTY DIVIDING ON THE ISSUE, THATCHER IS TOO ASTUTE POLITICALLY TO RISK A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE ON A PRO-UNIONIST POLICY.

--THE CIVIL SERVICE IS SOLIDLY BEHIND HMG'S CURRENT NI POLICY AND SENSITIVE TO THE IMPLICATIONS OF ANY SHIFT TOWARD THE MAJORITY COMMUNITY. THE MILITARY WOULD BEAR THE BRUNT OF ANY DETERIORATION IN THE NI SECURITY SITUATION AND, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW "HARD-LINERS" WHO FAVOR A MORE REPRESSIVE APPROACH TO THE PIRA, ARE SUPPORTIVE OF THE CURRENT POLICY. THE ADVICE AND INFLUENCE OF BOTH GROUPS, ACCORDINGLY, WOULD BE RANGED AGAINST ANY SUGGESTION OF A POLICY CHANGE THAT MIGHT LEAD TO THE RESTORATION OF PROTESTANT POLITICAL ASCENDENCY, AND THIS WOULD BE AN IMPORTANT BRAKE ON ANY TORY INITIATIVE IN THAT DIRECTION

--A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE IN NI, A HIGH PROBABILITY IN THE EVENT GOVERNMENT POLICY SHOULD BE PERCEIVED AS OVERTLY FAVORING THE PROTESTANTS, WOULD ENHANCE THE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED CONSTRAINTS AND HAVE A NEGATIVE POPULAR IMPACT. AND IF THE VIOLENCE SHOULD SPREAD TO BRITAIN ITSELF, THE POPULAR REACTION COULD BE CATASTROPHIC, AND THIS COULD BE EXPLOITED BY THE OPPOSITION.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LONDON 10564 02 OF 02 051721Z

--AN OVERT SHIFT TOWARD THE UNIONISTS WOULD ALSO BRING A SWIFT RESPONSE FROM THE GOI, INCREASING THE STRESS BETWEEN THE TWO GOV ##

PARTNERS

TOO WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BEGIN TO PRESSURE HMG TO RESTORE THE STATUS QUO ANTE OR MOVE TOWARD UNIFICATION OF THE NORTH WITH THE REPUBLIC. IN THIS REGARD BRITAIN'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE EC HAS ADDED A NEW CONSTRAINT ON ITS FREEDOM OF POLITICAL ACTION IN NI.

THE USG, UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE IRISH AMERICAN COMMUNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS, COULD BE EXPECTED TO ADE ITS WEIGHT TO THE INTENATIONAL REACTION.

4. ALTHOUGH NEAVE AND OTHER "HIGH TORIES" MAY NOT BE TOTALLY MINDFUL OF THE PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF A BRITISH POLICY STANCE FAVORING THE PROTESTANT COMMUNITY IN NI, THATCHER HERSELF AND OTHER SENIOR SHADOW CABINET MEMBERS ARE, AND THEIR AWARENESS WOULD SHAPE THE ACTIONS OF A FUTURE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT. IN THE EVENT OF A HUNG PARLIAMENT, THE TORIES MIGHT FEEL IMPELLED TO SHOW THE "ORANGE CARD" IN ORDER TO FORM A GOVERNMENT, BUT THEY DARE NOT PLAY IT, SINCE THE OPPOSITION AND CONSERVATIVE DISSIDENTS COULD TIP THE TABLE OVER. ALTHOUGH WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO WATCH DEVELOPMENTS CLOSELY, THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ANY NEED FOR THE USG TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF UNDERTAKING A CAUTIONARY APPROACH TO MRS. THATCHER AT THIS TIME.

BREWSTER

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LONDON10564
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780276-0164
Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780795/aaaadcgy.tel
Line Count: 243
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: b70dfc7a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 164631, 78 LONDON 10072
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2116477
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GENERAL ELECTION: THE CONSERVATIVES AND NORTHERN IRELAND
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odgc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b70dfc7a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014